

PHILOSOPHY 130 SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS FOR SECOND PAPER

Please Note: The following topics are suggestions for your second very short (2-3 page) paper. As with the first set of topics, a few cautions are in order. For some of the topics below, I have asked a series of questions. DO NOT treat these as if they constitute an essay exam. I do not intend for you to answer each of the questions asked under a given topic. If you try to answer them all, you will almost certainly fail to answer any of them well. The questions are intended to provoke and direct your thought about the subject. Part of your assignment involves narrowing a topic and selecting a specific thesis to defend.

If some topic discussed in readings, lecture or discussion was of particular interest to you but is not mentioned below, discuss the possibility of writing on that topic with your teaching associate. If it is an appropriate topic for a short paper in a beginning philosophy class, you may be allowed to write on it. Also, you will see that some of the topics are ones we will not touch on in the class (though they are addressed by readings in our book). Writing on one of these topics will require extra work, of course, but it may be worth it to you if you have a special interest in the topic.

These papers are due in your discussion section on Tuesday November 21, 2000.

1. What might a Kantian say in response to the objection raised in class about determining the maxim of one's action? Is there a way to do so without encountering the problem of excessive generality or excessive specificity? (Be sure to explain what these problems are.)
2. Is it permissible to kill non-human animals for food if there are equally healthy (available and inexpensive) diets that do not require killing animals? If so, why can't we kill people for food if we particularly like the taste of human flesh? (What are the *relevant* differences?) Does it follow from the assertion that we may kill animals for a pleasant diet, that we may do whatever we like to animals for our pleasure? If not, why not? (Suggested readings in addition to those assigned: *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer and *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* edited by Peter Singer and Tom Regan.)
3. Twentieth-century America is one of the wealthiest countries in history (in terms of the average standard of living of its citizens). Most of us did nothing to deserve this blessing (except to choose our parents wisely). Others are, obviously through no fault of their own, born into abject poverty—poverty of a kind seldom seen in this country. We see pictures of mothers carrying in their arms their babies as the babies starve to death because the mothers cannot get enough food and water to nurse them. If we have any imagination and moral sensitivity at all, we experience a moment of sympathetic pain at such sights. (Imagine carrying your infant child in your arms for weeks, looking for food and water but unable to find it, while you watch your baby die a slow and agonizing death in your arms.) Some charge that the mother and father are at fault in these cases for bringing into the world a child for which they cannot care. But this is often clearly false and always beside the point. Sometimes the parents *could* care for the child when they conceived it, and drought or pestilence caused a famine that none could have predicted. Sometimes the parents are, through no fault of their own, ignorant of birth control methods. But even if the parents can be blamed, the child is clearly

not at fault. The question is: if we have done nothing to deserve our relatively pleasant situation and the starving child, at least, has done nothing to deserve his/her situation, doesn't justice require that the inequalities be lessened? Shouldn't we, as individuals and as a nation, be engaging in a massive transfer of wealth to impoverished countries? And, furthermore, shouldn't we quit viewing this as charity, and begin viewing it as a duty of justice? If not, why not? (Suggested readings: *Morality and Moral Controversies* by John Arthur, pp. 273-280.)

4. In introducing the various positions on abortion we considered and dismissed quickly several arguments. (For example, we rejected mere genetic humanity or spontaneous breathing as features guaranteeing a special moral status for the fetus.) Did we reject any good arguments too quickly here? If so, choose *one* of these and develop the argument in a way that avoids the criticisms raised in class.
5. Our writers are apparently divided on the importance of the moral status of the fetus for determining the moral permissibility of abortion. Is determining the moral status of the fetus (for example, whether it is the sort of thing that is such that, other things being equal, it is seriously morally wrong to kill) a, or perhaps *the*, crucial question in the justification of abortion? Defend your answer.
6. In class, the "Moral Safety Argument" was accused of committing a fallacy of equivocation. Can this argument be formulated in a way that avoids equivocation? If so, do so and defend your formulation of the argument against criticisms (including the charge of equivocation)?
7. An ironic variant of the "Moral Safety Argument" goes like this: if we prohibit abortions, we know for certain that we are interfering with a morally important right (that of the woman to control her body and her future activities); if we allow abortions, we are not certain that we are allowing the violation of any rights at all; given this, being "morally safe" requires us to allow abortions in any cases in which the mother wants an abortion. Critically evaluate this argument.
8. Consider the central arguments of any of the authors in our readings on (*e.g.*, Thomson, Warren, Marquis). Present one of these arguments and critically evaluate it on grounds *other* than those raised to it in class (if any were). Or, defend the argument against criticisms that were raised in class or other readings.
9. What rights, if any, does the father have in a decision to abort, or not to abort, a fetus? What responsibilities does a father have to provide for a child that he doesn't want if the mother declines to get an abortion simply because she wants the child (not for health, moral or religious reasons)? Does it matter whether the mother mislead the father about the use of contraception or her willingness to get an abortion should she become pregnant? If the father wants the pregnancy to go to term and to raise the child himself, should he have any say in preventing an abortion if the mother wants an abortion for reasons other than moral, religious or health reasons?
10. Euthanasia is often treated as closely analogous to abortion. In some cases this may be accurate. Usually, it is not. For one thing, typical candidates for euthanasia are not beings with a potential for a normal human life. Furthermore, in the case of euthanasia (but not of abortion), the subject *can* volunteer for it. In discussing the justification of euthanasia, people often make a distinction between "active" and "passive" euthanasia—that is, between "killing" and "letting die". Is euthanasia of any sort (passive voluntary, active voluntary, passive non-voluntary, active non-voluntary) ever justified. (Notice that 'non-voluntary' doesn't mean the same as 'involuntary'. The

first is without the patient's consent, the second is against their wishes. Some patients are not capable of giving consent, and so, euthanasia can be non-voluntary without being involuntary.) If non-voluntary euthanasia is ever justified, whose decision should be decisive? Relatives? Doctors? The courts?